

ADDRESSING AMERICAN FOOD INSECURITY AND WELLNESS:
THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

by
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A capstone project submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Public Management

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Memorandum

**To: Norah Deluhery,
Acting Director
Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships
United States Department of Agriculture**

From: Kaitlin Kaufman

I. Action Forcing Statement:

On February 7, 2014, President Obama signed the Agriculture Act of 2014, an omnibus farm bill, which includes budget cuts to the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), a federally funded food assistance program. Just prior to this announcement, the Children's Defense Fund released a report stating, "1.2 million households with children had no cash income and depended only on SNAP to stave off hunger."¹

II. Statement of Problem

Hunger is on the rise in the United States. According to a United States Department of Agriculture 2013 report, approximately 48 million Americans face food insecurity, meaning they do not have adequate access to food.² Those individuals facing hunger experience significant health issues, lower academic achievement, and lower rate of job productivity.

Due to the Great Recession of the late 2000s, millions of Americans became unemployed in the midst of a foreclosure crisis, with dwindling or nonexistent savings.

¹ Children's Defense Fund, "The State of America's Children." Last modified January 23, 2014. Accessed January 28, 2014. <http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/2014-soac.pdf>.

² Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Mark Nord, and Anita Singh. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2012." Last modified September 2013. Accessed February 7, 2014.

Many found themselves in a position they'd never experienced prior to the downturn-facing malnutrition. Between 2006 and 2012, the USDA reported the number of households considered food insecure increased from 10.6 percent to 14.5 percent.^{3 4}

Percentage of Americans Who Struggled to Afford Food in Past Year

Have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?

■ % Yes



Monthly averages from January 2008-August 2013
Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

GALLUP®

Figure 1: Percentage of Americans Who Struggle to Afford Food in Past Year.
Source: Gallup⁵

Though the recession ended in December 2009, the economy has not recovered as quickly as expected, and high rates of unemployment continue. The US Census reported that the country's overall poverty rate continues to remain 2.5 percent higher than prerecession figures. In 2012, poverty rate among children was 21.8 percent, those

³ Andrews, Margaret, Mark Nord, and Steven Carlson. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Household Food Security in the United States, 2006." Last modified November 2006. Accessed February 8, 2014. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err49.aspx>

⁴ Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Mark Nord, and Anita Singh. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2012."

⁵ Brown, Alyssa. "More Americans Struggle to Afford Food." More Americans Struggle to Afford Food. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/164363/americans-struggle-afford-food.aspx> (accessed April 29, 2014).

between 18-64 it was 13.7 percent, and among seniors over the age of 65 it was 9.1 percent.⁶

Studies have shown even temporary malnutrition causes substantial repercussions for an individual's health and wellbeing, particularly undernourished children. Children from food insecure homes are more likely to have insufficient cognitive and physical development, a greater chance of hospitalization due to overall poor health, and a higher likelihood of behavioral and emotional difficulties.⁷ Children from poor households are 7 times more likely to be obese as they are to be underweight.⁸ In addition to the potential for heart disease and increased risk of diabetes, and the increased health care costs associated with obesity, this can cause severe mental anguish and further academic underachievement.⁹

These factors directly impact a worker's job readiness later in life, as one report states, "Workers who experience hunger as children are not as well prepared physically, mentally, emotionally or socially to perform effectively in the contemporary workforce...[they] create a workforce pool that is less competitive, with lower levels of educational and technical skills, and seriously constrained human capital."¹⁰ Children of food insecure homes are less likely to finish high school than their peers who grow up in

⁶ United States Census Bureau, "Income, Poverty and Health Insurance in the United States: 2012 - Highlights." Last modified 2013. Accessed February 8, 2014. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/inctpovhlth/2012/highlights.html>.

⁷ Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program, "Food Stamps as Medicine: A New Perspective on Children's Health." Last modified January 2007. Accessed February 7, 2014. http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/food_stamps_as_medicine_2007.pdf.

⁸ Blumenthal, Susan, David Ludwig, and Walter Willet. "Opportunities to Reduce Childhood Hunger and Obesity." *Journal of the American Medical Association*. no. 24 (2012): 2567-2568. http://susan-blumenthal.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2012.12_JAMA_Opportunities-to-Reduce-Childhood-Obesity.pdf (accessed February 10, 2014).

⁹ Cook, John, and Karen Jeng. Feeding America and The ConAgra Foods Foundation, "Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation." Last modified 2009. Accessed February 10, 2014. <http://feedingamerica.org/sitefiles/child-economy-study.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

food secure homes, many times a minimum requirement for today's job market; therefore, these individuals have less employability and long-term financial stability.¹¹

The Great Recession exasperated the hunger problem in the United States. This issue of food insecurity leaves many children to face physical, mental, and financial obstacles, which could have adverse affects for the country's future economy. To combat this, the U.S. government created several hunger prevention and federal nutrition safety net programs over the last half-century, SNAP is the most widely utilized among these.¹²

Many refer to SNAP as, "the first line of defense against hunger," but the entitlement's beneficiaries cite current funding as inadequate and at times, inconsistent; additionally, beneficiaries believe the program lacks a proper educational component. This often results in less healthy food purchases, skipping meals regularly, or facing a tradeoff between obligations such as paying utility bills or purchasing food.^{13 14} As the economy recovers, fewer Americans will qualify for SNAP assistance; however, those still enrolled are faced with cuts to their benefits. Due to the vast number of Americans dependent on food stamps, the amount of assistance directly relates with the level of food insecurity in the United States, as well as the overall wellness of participants.

¹¹ Cook, John, Gemma Donofrio, Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, Meredith Hickson, and Ingrid Weiss. Children's Health Watch, "Feeding Our Human Capital: Food Insecurity and Tomorrow's Workforce." Last modified September 3, 2013. Accessed February 10, 2014. http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/FeedingHumanCapital_report.pdf.

¹² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)." Last modified January 10, 2014. Accessed February 22, 2014. <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2226>.

¹³ United States Department of Food and Nutrition Service, "USDA Announces Results in Ongoing Effort to Improve SNAP Integrity." Last modified May 14, 2013. Accessed February 22, 2014. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2013/fns-000913>.

¹⁴ United States Department of Agriculture, "Nutrition Assistance Program Report Series." Last modified March 2013. Accessed February 20, 2014. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SNAPFoodSec.pdf>.

III. History

The origin of SNAP benefits is rooted in the Great Depression. When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office in 1933, the unemployment rate had reached approximately 25 percent. Soup kitchens and charities had become a vital source of food for Americans across the country, and farmers were left with excess produce that no one could afford to purchase.¹⁵ Under President Herbert Hoover, and at the start of the Roosevelt administration, the government paid farmers to destroy crops as well as slaughter and discard livestock in order to keep prices stable. This soon changed. By the end of 1933, in an effort to help farmers and grocers holding surplus produce, while providing some relief to malnourished Americans, the Roosevelt administration began to purchase the surplus goods and distributing it to the needy through the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation (FSRC). Six years later this practice evolved into the Food Stamp Program (FSP), for every \$1 spent, an individual received \$1.50 worth of food stamps divided into two denominations: An orange \$1 stamp that could purchase any grocery item (other than liquor and drugs), and blue stamp, worth \$.50 to be used only on surplus items as identified by the government. From 1939-1943, approximately 20 million utilized the FSP until World War II. The start of the war brought a new demand for workers, and troops abroad needed the surplus commodities, as food rationing began.^{16 17}

Anti-hunger advocates fought for the revival of the program throughout the 1950's, but it was not until Congress passed the Food Stamp Act of 1964, legally

¹⁵ Bernstein, Irving. United States Department of Labor, "Americans in Depression and War." Accessed February 20, 2014. <http://www.dol.gov/dol/aboutdol/history/chapter5.htm>.

¹⁶ James, Randy. TIME, "Food Stamps." Last modified September 14, 2009. Accessed February 20, 2014. <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1921992,00.html>.

¹⁷ Claffey, Barbara, and Thomas Stucker. "The Food Stamp Program." *The Academy of Political Science*. no. 3 (1982): 40-53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1173727> (accessed February 20, 2014).

establishing the food safety net once again. Continuing President John Kennedy's efforts to aid impoverished Americans, President Lyndon Johnson signed the bill that authorized spending for 3 years, beginning with \$75 million in 1965 and increasing to \$200 million in 1967, as part of his War on Poverty initiative.¹⁸ The legislation aimed, "To strengthen the agricultural economy; to help to achieve a fuller and more effective use of food abundances; to provide for improved levels of nutrition among low-income households through a cooperative Federal-State program of food assistance to be operated through normal channels of trade; and for other purposes."¹⁹ While advocates celebrated the legislation's passage, the program's funding only accommodated a few dozen counties across the country and maintained minimum purchasing requirements, meaning participants paid for their food stamps. Additionally, the purchasing of surplus produce still was a significant focus of the program, the legislation barring little regard to nutrition level of the food items participants could purchase. By 1967, 5.4 million people received FSP benefits, a fraction of the 29.9 million poor Americans.²⁰

That year, the American public quickly realized the limitations of the food stamp program and federal food assistance as a whole. As part of the War on Poverty initiative, Senators Robert Kennedy (D-NY) and Joseph P. Clark (D-PA) visited the Mississippi Delta, and found malnourished children living throughout the area. A year later, CBS aired its 1968 documentary entitled *Hunger in America*, depicting poverty, malnourishment, and starvation across the United States. Both Congress and the USDA

¹⁸ Roth, Dennis. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Food Stamps: 1932-1977: From Provisional and Pilot Programs to Permanent Policy." Last modified July 2013. Accessed February 20, 2014. <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/foodstamps.htm>.

¹⁹ U.S. Congress, 88th Congress. "H.R. 10222 The Food Stamp Act of 1964." Last modified August 31, 1964. Accessed February 22, 2014. http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/PL_88-525.pdf.

²⁰ Boehm, William, Paul Nelson, and Kathryn Longen. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Progress Toward Elimination Hunger in America." Last modified 1980. Accessed February 20, 2014. <http://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/CAT80734668/PDF>.

launched initiatives to investigate the severity of the problem, and President Richard Nixon called for action, “[But] in the past few years we have awakened to the distressing fact that despite our material abundance and agricultural wealth, many Americans suffer from malnutrition...That hunger and malnutrition should persist in a land such as ours is embarrassing and intolerable.”²¹ Nine years later, spearheaded by Senators George McGovern (D-SD) and Bob Dole (R-KS), Congress put forth The Food Stamp Act of 1977, amending the previous law passed 13 years earlier. This bill eliminated the required payments for food stamps, which allowed millions who previously could not afford to participate to enroll. Additionally, due to nutritional concerns food stamps were no longer attached to surplus commodities. By 1979, 18 million Americans received FSP benefits.

By 1981, the Department of Commerce estimated that 31.8 million Americans were classified as poor, of which 19.8 percent were children.²² This coincided with the first Reagan Administration, who viewed many federal social welfare programs as too expensive, wasteful, and not within government’s purview. As the administration promoted a higher reliance on private sector and state-led solutions, and aiming to cut the federal budget, they sought to lower funding for the FSP by 16 percent or \$1.8 billion.²³

²¹ Nixon, Richard. *Special Message to the Congress Recommending a Program To End Hunger in America. The American Presidency Project*. Edited by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. 1969. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2038> (accessed March 3, 2014).

²² United States Department of Commerce, "Characteristics of the Population Below the Poverty Level: 1." Accessed February 23, 2014. <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/popscan/p60-138.pdf>.

²³ Woodside, William. Fortune Magazine, "HUNGER IN AMERICA IS REAL: Millions go hungry because the government has cut back too far on food programs.." Last modified June 24, 1985. Accessed February 22, 2014. http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/1985/06/24/65980/.

²⁴At the time, a family of four with an annual income of \$10, 200, received the average food stamp benefit of approximately \$.47 per meal.²⁵ Under Regan, eligibility requirements changed, lowering the eligibility threshold from 150 percent of the poverty line to 130 percent, affecting 4 percent of enrollees.²⁶ Despite the administration's efforts, the program maintained an approximate 20 million participants throughout Reagan's time in office. It was not until the 1990's, due to economic growth and welfare reform, that the number of enrollees began to decline.²⁷ This trend was once again reversed at the start of the Great Recession. Renamed in 2008, the food stamps program was now entitled SNAP and all recipients received their benefits via an Electronic Benefits Transfer or EBT cards rather than in stamps, a change started under the Clinton administration.

IV. Background

As the unemployment rate continued to rise throughout the Great Recession, more Americans fell below the poverty line, and became eligible for the food stamp assistance programs. In 2003, approximately 21 million Americans received food stamp benefits; ten years later that number had more than doubled reaching approximately 48 million.²⁸ Though the number of new caseloads did grow rapidly, the program ultimately responded to the economic situation as it was supposed to- it allowed for newly impoverished

²⁴ Mihim, Stephen. "Reagan's Revolution Devolves Into a Food Stamp Skirmish." Bloomberg Business Week, September 23, 2013. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-09-23/reagan-s-revolution-devolves-into-a-food-stamp-skirmish.html> (accessed February 23, 2014).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hayward, Steven. *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution: 1980-1989*. Random House, 2009. <http://bit.ly/OuUIvm>

²⁷ Currie, Janet, and Jeffrey Grogger. Princeton University, "Explaining Recent Declines in Food Stamp Program Participation." Last modified February 2001. Accessed February 24, 2014. http://www.princeton.edu/~jcurrie/publications/Explaining_Recent_Declines.pdf.

²⁸ United States Department of Agriculture, "SNAP Annual Summary." Last modified February 7, 2014. Accessed March 3, 2014. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/snapsummary.htm>.

people to gain access to federal resources. The program's cost ballooned to \$80 billion a year due to the increased enrollment.

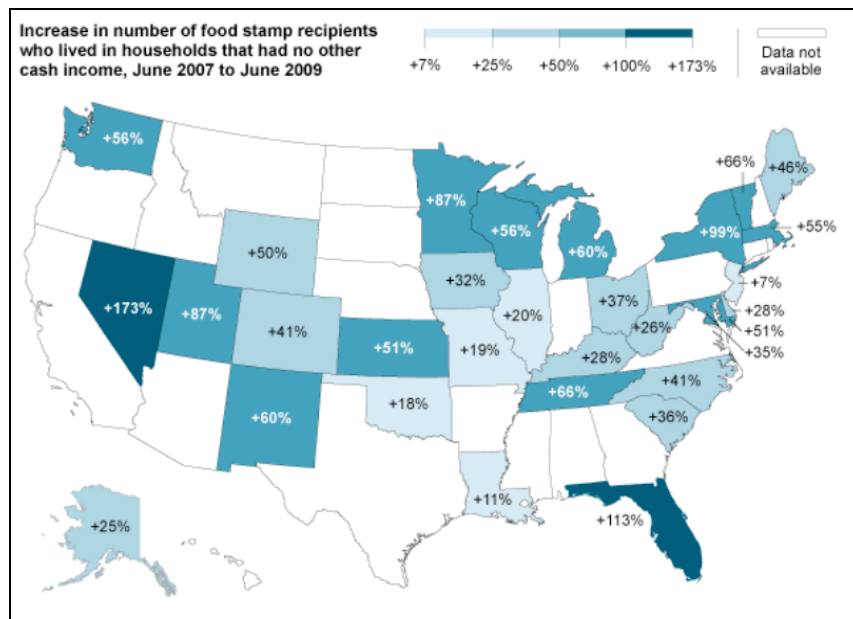


Figure 2: Increase in number of food stamp recipients who lived in households that had no other cash income, June 2007 to June 2009. Source: New York Times²⁹

The number of Americans receiving SNAP benefits remains high, even as the unemployment rate continues its decline since the height of the recession in 2009.

According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) this is due to a weak job market in which:

- “The unemployment rate overstates the improvement in the labor market since the economy hit bottom,”
- “The number of unemployed workers who aren’t receiving any unemployment insurance (UI) benefits — the group of the unemployed most likely to qualify for SNAP because they have neither wages nor UI benefits — has continued to grow

²⁹ Deparle, Jason. "Food Stamps, and Nothing Else." *The New York Times*, January 2, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/01/02/us/foodstamps-table.html> (accessed April 11, 2014).

and is *higher now than at the bottom of the recession*. Even as the overall number of unemployed workers has declined, the number of unemployed workers receiving no UI benefits has increased.,”

- “The historical record shows that declines in poverty and SNAP enrollment typically *lag behind* declines in the unemployment rate following recessions.³⁰

Again, just as SNAP enrollment grew as the recession worsened, the Congressional Budget Office’s projections expect participation to decrease over the next several years (figure 2).

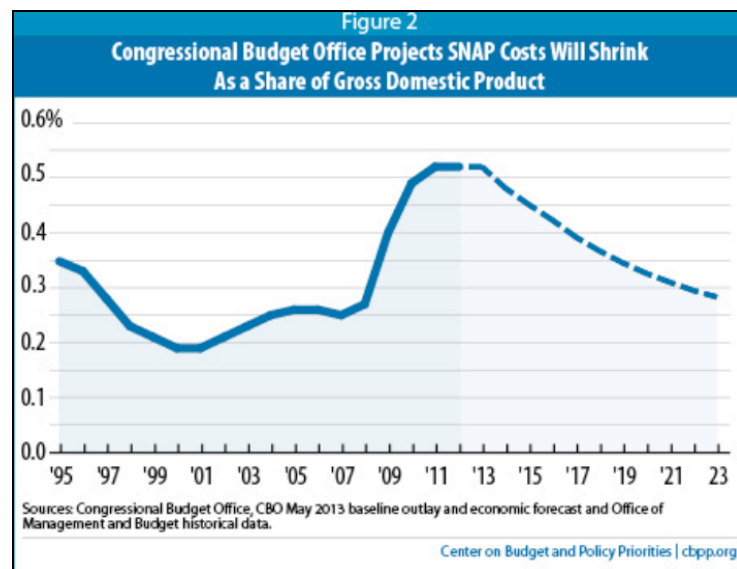


Figure 3: Congressional Budget Office Projects SNAP Costs Will Shrink As Share of Gross Domestic Product. (Source: cbpp.org)³¹

Currently, 72 percent of SNAP participants are in families with children and 25 percent of SNAP participants in households with seniors or people with disabilities. 91

³⁰ Bernstein, Jared, Chad Stone, Arloc Sherman, and Dottie Rosenbaum. "SNAP Enrollment Remains High Because the Job Market Remains Weak." Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3996> (accessed April 15, 2014).

³¹ Ibid.

percent of SNAP participants' household income falls below the poverty line.³²

According to a 2012 USDA study, an individual's enrollment in SNAP had profound impacts on the level of impoverishment they faced. USDA researchers found that when SNAP benefits are included in family income, both the depth of a child's poverty declines by 15.5 percent and severity of the child's poverty declines by 21.3 percent.³³

The SNAP program was even more impactful after expansion under 2009's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), increasing benefits to recipients. Though overall poverty did expand due to the Great Recession, SNAP benefits reduced the depth of a child's poverty by 20.9 percent, and the severity by 27.5 percent.³⁴ Despite SNAP's successes, a 2013 Gallup poll showed that as many as 20 percent of respondents reported lacking enough money to buy food need during the previous year, and 20 percent of respondents reportedly struggled to afford food, in addition to other basic necessities (Figure 1).³⁵

What was once a program that garnered bipartisan support has now become a political fault-line. Republicans believe expanded social welfare is proof of the Obama administration's failing economic policies.³⁶ The Republican Party considers increasing the national debt to fund such programs, will adversely affect the long-run economic

³² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)." Last modified January 10, 2014. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2226>.

³³ Tiehen, Laura, Dean Jolliffe, and Craig Gundersen. United States Department of Agriculture, "Alleviating Poverty in the United States: The Critical Role of SNAP Benefits." Last modified April 2012. Accessed March 10, 2014. http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/478608/err132_1_.pdf.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Brown, Alyssa. Gallup, Inc., "More Americans Struggle to Afford Food." Last modified September 12, 2013. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/164363/americans-struggle-afford-food.aspx>.

³⁶ "Mitch McConnell: Five Years Of Failed Obama Economic Policies | Video | RealClearPolitics." Real Clear Politics. http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2014/01/07/mitch_mcconnell_five_years_of_failed_obama_economic_policies.html (accessed April 20, 2014).

prosperity of the United States.³⁷ Because of this, the Republican-control House of Representatives have sought to decrease SNAP funding a number of times over the past several years.³⁸³⁹

On November 1 2013, ARRA's additional SNAP program funding expired, resulting in an average lost of \$36 per month for a family of four.⁴⁰ Three months later, the program faced additionally cuts with the passage of the Agriculture Act of 2014, which included a loss of \$8 billion of SNAP's funding over the next ten years. A portion of these savings comes from closing a heating subsidy loophole that a number of states used in order to provide their constituents with a greater amount of SNAP benefits.⁴¹ The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that 850,000 households will lose about \$90 per month.⁴²

That said, Congress did expand some programs benefiting SNAP beneficiaries. Over the last several years, several state and local governments have worked in conjunction with the USDA building partnerships with farmers and retailers to improve SNAP, encouraging and assisting beneficiaries to eat more healthily. A number of states have provided beneficiaries financial incentives to purchase a greater number of healthier

³⁷ Spodak, Cassie. "White House, Republicans push opposing economic agendas in weekly addresses." CNN. <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2014/04/05/white-house-republicans-push-opposing-economic-agendas-in-weekly-addresses/> (accessed April 22, 2014).

³⁸ Bouie, Janelle. "GOP Aims to Cut \$40 Billion Out of Food Stamps to Foil Illusory 'Cheaters'." The Daily Beast. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/05/gop-aims-to-cut-40-billion-out-of-food-stamps-to-foil-illusory-cheaters.html> (accessed April 20, 2014).

³⁹ Arumugam, Nadia. "Republicans Cut Food Stamps From Farm Bill, So What's The Big Deal?." Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nadiaarumugam/2013/07/13/republicans-cut-food-stamps-from-farm-bill-whats-the-big-deal/> (accessed April 20, 2014).

⁴⁰ Food Research and Action Center, "About the November 1 SNAP/Food Stamp Benefit Reduction." Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/snapfood-stamps/about-the-november-1-snapfood-stamp-benefit-reduction/>.

⁴¹ Tomson, Bill. "Andrew Cuomo games food stamp cut." *Politico*, February 26, 2014. <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/02/food-stamp-cut-new-york-andrew-cuomo-104021.html> (accessed March 10, 2014).

⁴² Congressional Budget Office, "H.R. 3102, Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act of 2013." Last modified September 16, 2013. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/44583>.

items. Based on food purchases, participants receive additional funding for the month, targeting SNAP beneficiaries' vegetable and fruit intake.

Recognizing the effectiveness of these partnerships, Congress included a matching funds program to increase the value of enrollees' benefits, and created the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grants in the Agricultural Act of 2014. This program allocates \$100 million for FY 2014 through 2018, allowing governmental agencies, authorized retailers, and non-profits that seek to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables to apply for grant funding. This program requires grant applicants to submit a proposal and that the applicant contribute 50 percent of the funding. This may be a barrier for smaller organization and local government.⁴³

While current enrollees figures remain around 48 million, economists anticipate this will decrease in the coming years. The CBO projects as the economy recovers, the number of SNAP beneficiaries will decrease to 34.3 million by 2023.⁴⁴

Stakeholders

United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service

Within the USDA, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) agency aims to, "to harness the Nation's agricultural abundance to end hunger and improve health in the United States," and is the administrative body responsible for SNAP, as well as the other

⁴³ Bolen, Ed, Dorothy Rosenbaum, and Stacy Dean. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Summary of the 2014 Farm Bill Nutrition Title: Includes Bipartisan Improvements to SNAP While Excluding Harsh House Provisions." Last modified February 3, 2014. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=4082>.

⁴⁴ Congressional Budget Office, "CBO's February 2013 Baseline for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program." Last modified 2013. Accessed March 10, 2014. [http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/43896-Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.pdf](http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/43896-Supplemental%20Nutrition%20Assistance%20Program.pdf).

domestic hunger relief programs.⁴⁵ This agency provides information about the program for current SNAP enrollees, produces materials regarding nutrition, maintains public and private partnerships to ensure participation, and provides grant funding to researchers and organizations performing pilot nutrition programs. FNS also reports to Congress regarding SNAP's funding and its anti-fraud efforts. The newest farm bill eliminates the USDA's roll in promoting SNAP benefits, which was designed to recruit new enrollees.

Office of the First Lady Michelle Obama

To address the United State's childhood obesity epidemic, First Lady Michelle Obama created the *Let's Move!* initiative in 2010. *Let's Move!* focuses on five concepts: Creating a healthy start for children; empowering parents and caregivers; providing healthy food in schools; improving access to healthy, affordable food; increasing physical activity.⁴⁶ Let's Move! partners with corporations, nonprofits, foundations, religious organizations and community groups to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles. For the purpose of this paper, the most notable component is the efforts to teach SNAP recipients effective grocery shopping habits to promote healthier eating.⁴⁷

House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture Chairman Frank D. Lucas (R-OK)

Representative Frank Lucas began his chairman of the Committee on Agriculture in 2011, represents Oklahoma's 3rd district, and maintains strong ties to the agribusiness

⁴⁵ United States Department of Agriculture, "USDA Mission Area." Accessed March 10, 2014. http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=missionarea_FNC.xml&x=16&y=9.

⁴⁶ "Let's Move." America's Move to Raise A Healthier Generation of Kids. <http://www.letsmove.gov/about> (accessed April 15, 2014).

⁴⁷ Duswalt, Marissa. "Let's Move to Buy Groceries with SNAP." United States Department of Agriculture. <http://blogs.usda.gov/2011/10/27/let's-move-to-buy-groceries-with-snap/> (accessed April 15, 2014).

community. This committee maintains legislative jurisdiction regarding the agriculture industry, its regulations, food and nutrition programs, as well as farm security and crop insurance. In 2011-2012, a number of his campaign contributions came from agribusiness, including the American Farm Bureau, the Dairy Farmers of America, American Association of Crop Insurers, and the Farm Credit Council, receiving a total upwards of \$709,000 from various sectors of the industry.^{48 49} While Chairman Lucas is more temperate on the issue of food assistance programs than many of his Republican colleagues, he still finds fault in the emphasis placed on feeding programs rather than crop insurance, "Over time, the nutrition advocates have taken us to the point where approximately 80 percent of farm bill spending is on the nutrition programs, the feeding programs as some people call them in my town meetings. And the other 20 percent goes to programs that ultimately raise the food. Is that the right balance? Well probably not...And maybe we need to work harder on growing the economy and expanding economic opportunity and giving people ... a way to make their own living without the support of the so-called feeding programs."⁵⁰ Lucas led negotiation efforts in conjunction with Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwomen Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) leading to the final passage of the Agriculture Act 2014.

⁴⁸ Open Secrets: Center for Responsive Politics, "Frank D. Lucas, Top 20 Contributors." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.opensecrets.org/politicians/contrib.php?cycle=2012&type=I&cid=N00005559&newMem=N&ecs=20>.

⁴⁹ Open Secrets: Center for Responsive Politics, "Frank D. Lucas, Top Industries." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.opensecrets.org/politicians/contrib.php?cycle=2012&type=I&cid=N00005559&newMem=N&ecs=20>.

⁵⁰ Congressional Office of Congressman Frank Lucas, "In the News." Last modified September 29, 2013. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://lucas.house.gov/news/oklahoman-oklahoma-rep-frank-lucas-talks-turkey-and-milk-food-stamps-ethanol-and-getting-along>.

**Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)**

Senator Debbie Stabenow was appointed chairwoman of the Senate's Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry in 2011, while serving her third term as Michigan's junior senator. This committee maintains legislative jurisdiction similar to the House's Agriculture Committee. Like Lucas, Stabenow received a number of campaign contributions from the agriculture community, accepting approximately \$586,000 in 2012 alone.⁵¹ Though Stabenow's office released a statement saying, "she was the number one defender against House Republican proposal to cut food assistance," she allowed the \$8 billions decrease in SNAP funding as a compromise, allowing the Agricultural Act of 2014 to pass.⁵²

State governments

Currently, the federal government is responsible for the benefits SNAP participants receive, while the state is responsible for any administrative and operational cost they incur while distributing benefits. Though need is expected to decrease as the economy recovers, states are likely to sustain new costs due to changes in the SNAP legislation such as the closing of the "heat and eat" loophole. The new legislation raises states' minimum level of heating subsidies a state must provide its constituents in order to qualify for that household to receive extra SNAP benefits. While Congress aimed to use this as a means to curb SNAP funding, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo stated that

⁵¹ Open Secrets: Center for Responsive Politics, "Sen. Debbie Stabenow, Top Industries 2007-2012." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.opensecrets.org/politicians/contrib.php?cycle=2012&type=I&cid=N00005559&newMem=N&ecs=20>.

⁵² Kaufmann, Greg. "Why Is a Senate Democrat Agreeing to Another \$8 Billion in Food Stamp Cuts?." *The Nation*, December 6, 2013. <http://www.thenation.com/blog/177495/why-senate-democrat-agreeing-another-8-billion-food-stamp-cuts> (accessed March 10, 2014).

New York would raise the state's contribution to meet the minimum criteria, therefore allowing the excess SNAP benefits to continue.⁵³ As of March 2014, the governors of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Oregon and Montana have followed Governor Cuomo's lead, maintaining their constituents' SNAP benefits.⁵⁴

Agribusiness

The agriculture lobby has had a palatable presence in Washington for decades, and wields significant power throughout Congress. This vast reach allows for favorable conditions and hold tremendous amount of legislative influence. The American Farm Bureau, the International Dairy Foods Association, the American Association of Crop Insurers, and the National Association of Wheat Growers are just a few of the many number of agriculture-related business spending significant amount of capital on lobbying efforts and campaign contributions. According to a Food & Water Watch report, the 2008 farm bill attracted over \$85 million in lobbying efforts from the agribusiness community.⁵⁵

Advocacy groups

The Food Research and Action Center, Feed America, Share Our Strength, among other anti-hunger and children's advocacy organizations, have not only fought any legislative attempts to curtail the SNAP program, but they have actively sought to expand the amount of benefits participants receive. These organizations lead public awareness

⁵³ Tomson, Bill. "Andrew Cuomo games food stamp cut." *Politico*, February 26, 2014. <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/02/food-stamp-cut-new-york-andrew-cuomo-104021.html> (accessed March 10, 2014).

⁵⁴ Garofalo, Pat. "Learn to Love This Loophole." *U.S. News and World Report*, March 20, 2014. <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/pat-garofalo/2014/03/20/governors-use-a-food-stamp-loophole-to-keep-families-fed> (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁵⁵ Food and Water Watch, "Cultivating Influence: The 2008 Farm Bill Lobbying Frenzy." Last modified 2008. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/cultivating-influence/>.

campaigns, produced documentaries, have robust lobbying efforts, conduct research, as well as coordinate hunger relief efforts across the country through food pantries, charity events, and volunteer initiatives.

Private Corporations

American companies make a significant amount of revenue from SNAP. Consumer goods producers such as Kraft and PepsiCo and food distributors such as Kroger and Wal-Mart, all gain profits through this program. SNAP allows consumers the flexibility and capital to purchase goods that they otherwise could not afford or would choose to forgo, benefiting these corporations' sales. Kraft CEO Tony Vernon came out against the Agriculture Act of 2014 stating, "The SNAP program is a program we are supportive of...[SNAP beneficiaries] are a big part of our audience." He stated that one-sixth of Kraft's revenues comes from SNAP purchases.⁵⁶

Outside of the food industry, corporations such as J.P. Morgan Chase and Xerox received multi-year, multi-million dollar government contracts in various states to handle EBT services. In one instance, J.P. Morgan Chase received over \$126 million for a 7-year contract with the state of New York to perform EBT services.⁵⁷

SNAP Recipients

With 48 million Americans receiving SNAP benefits, it is a vast constituency, but one with very little political efficacy. Half of SNAP beneficiaries are children, therefore

⁵⁶ Hindman, Nate. "Kraft CEO Comes Out Against Cuts To U.S. Food Stamp Program." *The Huffington Post*, September 10, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/10/kraft-food-stamps_n_1871334.html (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁵⁷ Simon, Michele. Eat Drink Politics, "Food Stamps: Follow the Money." Last modified June 2012. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.eatdrinkpolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/FoodStampsFollowtheMoneySimon.pdf>.

are ineligible to vote, while the adult population face significant time and monetary constraints, limiting their political participation.⁵⁸ In 2012, 47 percent of eligible adults with family incomes of less than \$20,000 a year voted; conversely, 80 percent of those eligible adults with family incomes of \$100,000 or more turned out to vote that same year.⁵⁹ Though participation should decrease as the economy improves, those remaining SNAP participants will be facing lesser monthly allowances, and will have to supplement their incomes by other means in order to purchase food.

V. Policy Proposal

To incentivize healthy eating habits and to address the food insecurity among SNAP beneficiaries, one proposal is a new program that rewards enrollees extra monetary benefits at the point-of-sale when purchasing fruits and vegetables. This is modeled after a pilot program authorized under The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 entitled the Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP).

Through the amendment process, Congress can amend the Agricultural Act of 2014 to create a nationwide program similar to HIP. The program would follow the same funding structure as the SNAP, the federal government paying the cost of the program, while sharing administrative costs with the state government. This would not be a mandated venture for states, but a program that states could opt-into. It would not require the creation any new infrastructure, though state departments would have to be trained to run the program's administrative demands just as the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) office did previously, such as educating its constituency

⁵⁸ Weeks, Daniel. "Democracy in Poverty: A View from Below." working paper., Harvard University, 2013. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2264877.

⁵⁹ Weeks, Daniel. "Why are the Poor and Minorities Less Likely to Vote?." *The Atlantic*, January 10, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/01/why-are-the-poor-and-minorities-less-likely-to-vote/282896/> (accessed March 10, 2014).

about the new incentives. According to the USDA's report, DTA, "put considerable effort into developing participant notification and training materials, working to design brochures and other information that were easy to understand..." which could be utilized by other states.⁶⁰

Like HIP, it would provide 30 cents at the point-of-sale of approved fruits and vegetables; however, there would be a maximum limit of \$12 in earned funds per capita per household. For example, if a SNAP recipient is a household of 1, that individual would spend \$40 of their monthly benefits on targeted fruits and vegetables, and automatically accrue an additional \$12 to utilize in any future SNAP purchases. Due of the nature of SNAP, the cost of the program will decrease annually as the economy continues to improve and the number of SNAP enrollees decreases.

VI. Policy Analysis

There are a number of factors to take into consideration when discussing whether or not to introduce this policy of incentivizing fruit and vegetable intake for SNAP enrollees. To begin with, SNAP as a policy in itself is considered sound policy. It effectively responds to the economic climate, as the economy improves the number of SNAP enrollees automatically decrease. The USDA estimates that for each \$1 billion increase in food stamp benefits, up to 18,000 full-time jobs are created or maintained.^{61 62}

⁶⁰ United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, "Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) Interim Report." Last modified July 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/HIP_Interim.pdf.

⁶¹ Geiger, Kim. "Poll: Government should do more to ensure access to fresh, local foods." *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 2012. <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/may/23/news/la-pn-more-americans-now-eating-whole-grains-fresh-produce-20120523> (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁶² United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Linkages with the General Economy." Last modified June 19, 2012. Accessed

Additionally, according to Moody's Analytics for every SNAP dollar spent, approximately \$1.70 in economic activity is generated.⁶³ According to a 2013 Census Bureau report, when considered as part of income, SNAP benefits lifted 4 million Americans above the poverty line in 2012.⁶⁴

This policy would financially benefit both SNAP participants as well as producers. By providing increased SNAP funds, enrollees can use their income on other essential items such as rent, utilities, or other grocery items not included in SNAP such as toiletries. Additionally, grocers and farmers receive a greater amount of income as well. This policy would ultimately provide a 30 percent discount on items that SNAP enrollees might have declined to purchase in the past due to price. Further, this policy could lessen the number of food deserts across the country, areas defined as, "limited access to affordable and nutritious food." This is prevalent among SNAP participants who live an average distance of 1.8 miles from grocery stores and often do not have access to a car.

Large food retailers are less likely to open stores in low-income and rural areas due to unreliable income of their would-be customers.^{65 66} This policy could encourage

April 11, 2014. [http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-\(snap\)/economic-linkages.aspx](http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-(snap)/economic-linkages.aspx)

⁶³ Zandi, Mark. Moody's Analytics, "The Economic Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act." Last modified January 21, 2009. Accessed April 11, 2014. https://www.economy.com/mark-zandi/documents/Economic_Stimulus_House_Plan_012109.pdf.

⁶⁴ Parrott, Sharon. Center on Budget and Policy Priority, "Census: SNAP Lifted 4 Million People Out of Poverty in 2012 and Reduced Hardship for Millions More." Last modified September 17, 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://www.offthechartsblog.org/census-snap-lifted-4-million-people-out-of-poverty-in-2012-and-reduced-hardship-for-millions-more/>.

⁶⁵ United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food—Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and Their Consequences: Report to Congress." Last modified June 2009. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ap-administrative-publication/ap-036.aspx>

⁶⁶ United States Department of Agriculture, "Benefit Redemption Patterns in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program." Last modified February 2011. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ARRASpendingPatterns_Summary.pdf.

retailers to open new stores in low-income areas with a greater amount of funding going to the consumers.⁶⁷

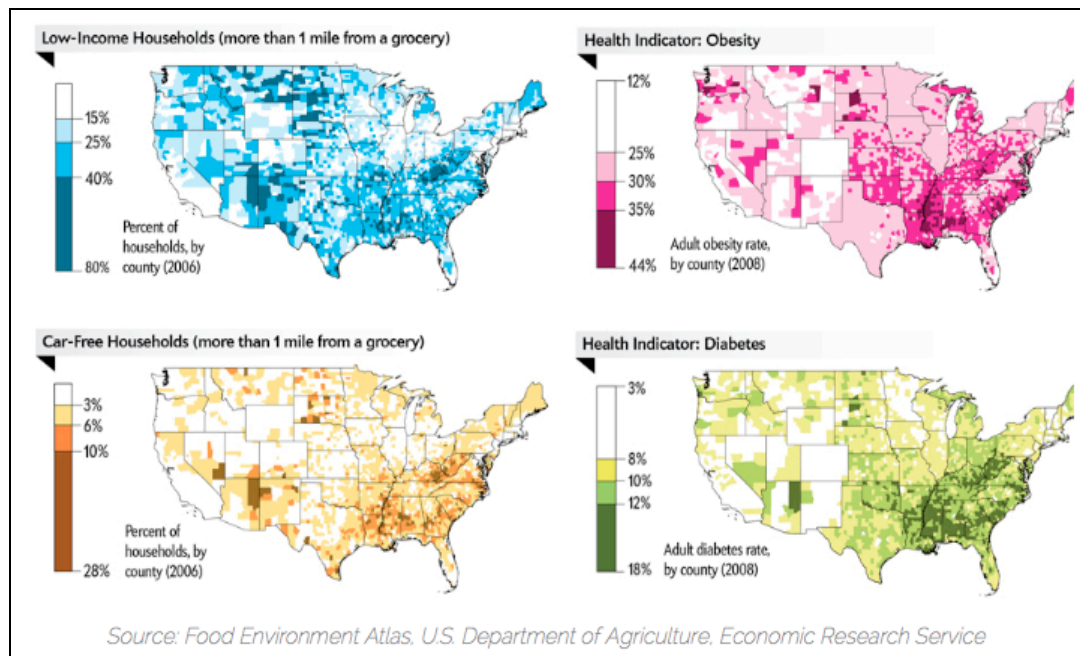


Figure 4: The Unfortunate Reality of Food Deserts and How We Can Beat Them.

(Source: RealFarmacy.com)⁶⁸

Moreover, the technology needed to execute this new policy already exists.

Because all food purchase transactions are done electronically, the credits accrued can be automatically applied to a SNAP enrollee's EBT card. These rebates would be accessible immediately, allowing SNAP participants to buy items with "earned" SNAP money.

Utilization of EBT cards for the SNAP program in FY2011 had a 96.2% payment accuracy rate, and the rate of payment error rate was 3.8%.⁶⁹ This policy also provides

⁶⁷ Cook, Christopher. "CHARTS: The Hidden Benefits of Food Stamps." Mother Jones, October 25, 2013. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/10/food-stamps-statistics-SNAP-economic-benefits> (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁶⁸ Agorist, Matt. "The Unfortunate Reality of Food Deserts and How We Can Beat Them." REALfarmacy.com. <http://www.realfarmacy.com/the-unfortunate-reality-of-food-deserts-and-how-we-can-beat-them/> (accessed April 15, 2014).

⁶⁹ Feeding America, "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)." Last modified 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. <https://feedingamerica.org/how-we-fight-hunger/advocacy-public-policy/policy-center/federal-anti-hunger-programs-and-policies/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program.aspx>.

beneficiaries flexibility and empowers beneficiaries as consumers to purchase the healthier food option. With the immediate credit they receive for choosing to buy targeted fruits and vegetables, participants have the opportunity to purchase more food, and of a greater a variety- something enrollees forgo in order to buy enough on their monthly benefits.⁷⁰

Most significantly, earned matching SNAP funds for targeted fruits and vegetables aim to achieve to two critical goals: help curb food insecurity among enrollees and promote overall wellness. As described in previously, SNAP is meant to supplement a participant's income to make food more affordable, but beneficiaries often rely on it as their sole source of income to purchase food.⁷¹ This policy would provide relief to those enrollees who find their current monthly benefits inadequate with additional funds, lessening their food insecurity. Additionally, promoting the purchase of targeted fruits and vegetables has the potential to improve SNAP enrollee's overall health. The greater consumption of fruits and vegetables is associated with higher academic achievement, better job performance, and greater life expectancy.⁷²

However, there is a substantial problem with the proposed policy: the true cost of the proposed policy is unclear. Though highly unlikely, if every state and SNAP enrollee participated and fully utilized the available funding in 2015, this program would add an estimated \$6.9 billion to the existing annual program cost of \$80 billion, not taking

⁷⁰ United States Department of Food and Nutrition Service, "SNAP Food Security In-Depth Interview Study: Final Report." Last modified March 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SNAPFoodSec.pdf>.

⁷¹ Deparle, Jason. "Living on Nothing but Food Stamps." *The New York Times*, January 2, 2010.
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/us/03foodstamps.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁷² Cook, John, and Karen Jeng. Feeding America and The ConAgra Foods Foundation, "Child Food Insecurity: The Economic Impact on our Nation." Last modified 2009. Accessed February 10, 2014.
<http://feedingamerica.org/sitefiles/child-economy-study.pdf>.

administrative costs into account. Those states willing to participate in the program could be facing new costs. One significant cost is educating SNAP participants about the program itself, which requires additional staff and staff training.⁷³ Currently, many SNAP participants carefully plan the use of their monthly benefits to ensure adequate meal planning.⁷⁴ If the state does not create an effective education plan, enrollees would likely not utilize the incentive.⁷⁵

Historical Comparisons

As stated earlier, this is modeled after the HIP pilot program created in 2008. Congress authorized \$20 million to create, operate, and study the effectiveness of the program. Implemented by the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, HIP operated between November 2011 and December 2012, and 7,500 SNAP-eligible households in Hampton County, Massachusetts were randomly selected to participate for a 12-month period. This county has the lowest median income in Massachusetts.

Through this pilot program, for every SNAP dollar spent on HIP targeted fruits and vegetables at participating HIP retailers, 30 cents was automatically credited back to their EBT card. These credits could be used on any future SNAP purchase. HIP targeted

⁷³ United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, "Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) Interim Report." Last modified July 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/HIP_Interim.pdf.

⁷⁴ Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Mark Nord, and Anita Singh. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2012." Last modified September 2013. Accessed February 7, 2014.

⁷⁵ United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, "Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) Interim Report." Last modified July 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/HIP_Interim.pdf.

fruits and vegetables included fresh, frozen, dried, and canned fruits and vegetables without added sugar, salt, fats, or oils with some exceptions.⁷⁶

At the conclusion of the pilot program USDA reported the following:

- HIP participants consumed 25 percent more fruits and vegetables than nonparticipants.
- 70 percent of HIP households felt that fruits and vegetables had become more affordable due to HIP.
- HIP participants self-reported that they purchased a larger amount and a greater variety of fruits and vegetables because of HIP.
- HIP participants had fruit and vegetables more frequently available at home than nonparticipants.
- 95 percent of respondents indicated that they would like to continue their participation in HIP.
- Though families were allocated up to \$60 per month of earned matching funds, on average, “during March to July 2012, HIP households spent \$12.13 on targeted fruits and vegetables in participating stores and earned an average incentive of \$3.64 each month. Excluding those households that did not earn any incentive during the month, HIP households made \$18.50 in targeted fruit and vegetable purchases and earned \$5.55 in incentives.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Department of Health and Human Services, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, "Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP)." Last modified 2014. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/basic-needs/food/snap/hip/>.

⁷⁷ United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, "Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) Interim Report." Last modified July 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/HIP_Interim.pdf.

The report also highlighted a lack of knowledge or understanding of the program by participants in the initial months of the program's implementation, as well as stagnant participation in nutritional education.⁷⁸ States across the country such as Michigan also have similar matching programs, though funded through and distributed by foundations and nonprofits, and have found similar participant enthusiasm.⁷⁹

VII. Political Analysis

When Republicans took control of the House of Representatives in 2010, they brought with them a majority pursuing austerity and budgetary rollbacks. Defunding social programs became a high priority as a means of lowering deficit spending. One example of this was H.R. 3102: Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act of 2013, when 217 House Republicans voted to cut \$39 billion from SNAP.⁸⁰ ⁸¹ Prior to the bill's passage, Representative Steven Fincher (R-TN) expressed his feelings on SNAP funding, "The role of citizens, of Christians, of humanity is to take care of each other, but not for Washington to steal from those in the country and give to others in the country," and House Speaker John Boehner said, "This bill makes getting Americans back to work a priority again for our nation's welfare programs."⁸² ⁸³ While 17 House Republicans voted

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Fair Food Network, "Double Up Food Bucks." Last modified 2014. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://www.fairfoodnetwork.org/what-we-do/projects/double-food-bucks>.

⁸⁰ Dann, Carrie, and Frank Thorp. "House GOP votes to cut \$39 billion from food stamp program." *NBC News*, September 19, 2013. <http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/in-plain-sight/house-gop-votes-cut-39-billion-food-stamp-program-f4B11200650> (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁸¹ GovTrack.us, "H.R. 3102: Nutrition Reform and Work Opportunity Act of 2013." Last modified 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr3102>.

⁸² Shen, Aviva. "Congressman Who Gets Millions In Farm Subsidies Denounces Food Stamps As Stealing 'Other People's Money'." *Think Progress*, May 21, 2013. <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2013/05/21/2042831/congressman-who-gets-millions-in-farm-subsidies-denounces-food-stamps-as-stealing-other-peoples-money/> (accessed April 11, 2014).

against the 2013 proposed reduction, none have publicly stated their support for expansion.

Democratic Senator and Agriculture Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow allowed SNAP cuts during the Agricultural Act of 2014 negotiations, though promised the reductions focused on maintaining the program's integrity, "The Senate bill saves \$4 billion solely through ending program misuse—like stopping lottery winners from continuing to receive assistance, cracking down on retailer benefit trafficking, and curbing the misuse of a LIHEAP paper work policy by a small number of states."⁸⁴ This commitment to the correcting the "program misuse" allowed both liberal and moderate Democrats to vote for the bill, this marked the first Democratic-controlled Senate voting for reduce SNAP funding.⁸⁵ That said, a number of Democrats maintain full-throated support for the expansion of SNAP. In October 2013, Representative John Conyers, Jr. and Senator Bob Casey, Jr., introduced H.R 3353 and S. 1635, respectively, the Extend Not Cut SNAP Benefits Act. Both versions of the bill remain in committee and only have Democratic cosponsors.^{86 87} According to GovTrack.us, there is a 1 percent chance of either of these bills being enacted.^{88 89} In March 2014, the Progressive Caucus published

⁸³ Nixon, Ron. "House Republicans Pass Deep Cuts in Food Stamps." *The New York Times*, September 19, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/20/us/politics/house-passes-bill-cutting-40-billion-from-food-stamps.html> (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁸⁴ Kaufmann, Greg. "Why Is a Senate Democrat Agreeing to Another \$8 Billion in Food Stamp Cuts?." *The Nation*, December 6, 2013. <http://www.thenation.com/blog/177495/why-senate-democrat-agreeing-another-8-billion-food-stamp-cuts> (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Food Research and Action Center's Action Council, "H.R.3353: Extend Not Cut SNAP Benefits Act." Last modified September 17, 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://org2.salsalabs.com/o/5118/p/salsa/web/common/public/content?content_item_KEY=11515.

⁸⁷ Congress.gov, "S.1635 - Extend Not Cut SNAP Benefits Act." Last modified 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. [http://beta.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/1635/cosponsors?q={\"search\":\[\"s. 1635\"\]}](http://beta.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/1635/cosponsors?q={\).

⁸⁸ GovTrack.us, "H.R. 3353: Extend Not Cut SNAP Benefits Act." Last modified 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr3353>

⁸⁹ GovTrack.us, "S. 1635: Extend Not Cut SNAP Benefits Act." Last modified 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/s1635>.

the *Better off Budget*, calling on Congress to restore funding that was recently cut through this year's farm bill, "by an average of \$90 per month for 850,000 families living in 15 states." Additionally the budget, "boosts SNAP benefits by an average of \$36 per month for a family of four by permanently adopting the enhanced levels established in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act."⁹⁰ Despite these efforts, the proposed policy is not political viable and has little chance passing either house in the 113th Congress.

2013 polling provides a similar picture. A *National Journal* poll found that 67 percent of Americans wanted Congress to implement tougher standards for those receive SNAP benefits, including drug-testing and work requirements. In the same poll, 66 percent of respondents believed that the biggest problem with SNAP was, "too much waste, fraud, and abuse," while 12 percent of respondents believed the most significant issue was that, "too many people were eligible to receive assistance."⁹¹ Though a gross distortion of most SNAP participants, these feelings are often driven by the decades-old notion of the welfare queen, or more recently the unemployed-by-choice surfer Jason Greenslate with no dependents. The Californian musician received \$200 a month in SNAP benefits. During his Fox News interview he stated he was, "livin' the ratt life..." and when discussing his SNAP benefits, "it's free food...it's awesome." This interview fueled 2013's conservative fervor against the SNAP program serving as an example of an contemptible food assistance beneficiary.⁹²

⁹⁰ Congressional Progressive Caucus, "Better Off Budget." Last modified 2014. Accessed April 11, 2014. [http://cpc.grijalva.house.gov/uploads/The Better Off Budget.pdf](http://cpc.grijalva.house.gov/uploads/The%20Better%20Off%20Budget.pdf).

⁹¹ Roarty, Alex. "Most Americans Want Tougher Food-Stamp Requirements." *The National Journal*, December 18, 2013. <http://www.nationaljournal.com/economy/most-americans-want-tougher-food-stamp-requirements-20131218> (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁹² Halloran, Liz. NPR, "Lobster Boy Looms Large In Food Stamp Debate." Last modified September 19, 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2013/09/19/223796325/lobster-boy-looms-large-in-food-stamp-debate>.

According to a *Huffington Post*/YouGov poll Republicans largely support the original \$5 billion of SNAP cuts made by Congress 67 percent to 25 percent, while Democrats opposed the cuts 67 to 28 percent, and Independent voters were split, with 40 percent supporting the cuts and 48 disapproving the cuts.⁹³ Another YouGov poll found that 48 percent of respondents strongly or somewhat favored, “limiting the food stamps program so that recipients could only buy healthy, low-cost foods like rice and beans,” while 43 percent opposed such restrictions.⁹⁴ Conversely, a 2012 poll conducted by Lauer Johnson Research found that 75 percent of respondents supported a national program to double the value of SNAP benefits when used at farmers’ markets and 68 percent of respondents said it’s very important that all Americans have equal access to fresh fruits and vegetables.⁹⁵

Another potential political hurdle are well-funded interest groups. Currently, there are bans on purchasing certain items such as alcohol or toiletries, but no federal program specifically promoting the purchase of certain items. Many processed food companies such as Kraft, Mars, the American Beverage Association and ConAgra oppose any such purchasing bans that may discourage the purchase of unhealthy foods, stating they believe that SNAP participants should be able to purchase any item without penalty. If such bans were put in place, it would adversely affect their business.^{96 97} It is possible

⁹³ Isquith, Elias. Salon.com, "Poll: GOP voters love food stamp cuts." Last modified November 15, 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://www.salon.com/2013/11/15/poll_gop_voters_love_food_stamp_cuts/.

⁹⁴ Moore, Peter. YouGov, "Poll Results: Food Stamps." Last modified November 13, 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://today.yougov.com/news/2013/11/13/poll-results-food-stamps/>.

⁹⁵ The Food and Agriculture Policy Collaborative, "Healthy Food, Healthy Economics." Last modified 2012. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://frac.org/pdf/food_ag_policy_collaborative_hfhe.pdf.

⁹⁶ Hartocollis, Anemona. "Unlikely Allies in Food Stamp Debate." *The New York Times*, October 16, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/17/weekinreview/17hartocollis.html?_r=0 (accessed April 11, 2014).

⁹⁷ Black, Jane. "SNAP Judgment." *Slate*, August 6, 2013. http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2013/08/food_stamp_choices_should_people_be_allowed_to_buy_junk_food_with_their.html (accessed April 11, 2014).

they would oppose the proposed policy for fear that it would too drive consumers away from their products, and towards less processed and/or fresh foods. According to a poll conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health, "...of the 46 percent of SNAP participants who initially opposed banning the purchase of sugary drinks, 45 percent would change their position and support the policy if the new rules included additional benefits to purchase healthful foods."⁹⁸ That said, other interest groups from the fruit and vegetable industry such as the Western Growers Association and Florida Citrus Mutual, would likely support such legislation; however, these entities maintain a much smaller lobbying presence than the robust operations of aforementioned conglomerates.⁹⁹

Though advocacy groups such as Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and Share Our Strength (SOS), often find themselves aligned with the corporations mentioned earlier when it comes to fighting limitations set on SNAP households, it is likely they would support the proposed policy for the following reasons:

- Anti-hunger groups are concerned with disallowing the SNAP beneficiaries to enjoy the right to choose what they purchase. Because the policy does not force the purchase or limit the option to choose an item not on the "approved" lists, this allows SNAP participants to be free consumers.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ OpenSecrets.org, "Vegetable & Fruits: Background." Last modified February 2010. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/background.php?cycle=2014&ind=A1400>.

¹⁰⁰ Hartocollis, Anemona. "Unlikely Allies in Food Stamp Debate." *The New York Times*, October 16, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/17/weekinreview/17hartocollis.html?_r=0 (accessed April 11, 2014).

- Anti-hunger groups recognize the link between food security, and quality of life. This policy would empower the consumer to pursue those healthier options, while lessening food insecurity.¹⁰¹
- These organizations are continuously advocating for greater funding and highlighting the current funding inadequacies that SNAP enrollees faces.¹⁰²

VIII. Recommendation

Congress needs to address SNAP enrollees' food security and accessibility to healthy food; that said, the aforementioned policy should not be pursued at this time for the following reasons:

- Political climate: Any legislation that increases social programs will not pass the House of Representative's Republican majority and has a very low probability of passing the Senate, despite the Democratic majority. In spite of recent cuts and consistent GOP opposition, there are already members of Congress pursuing such funding increases to SNAP, largely in vein. There is no reason to spend political capital on a policy proposal that is not politically viable with elected officials or voters.
- Uncertain Cost: This policy is designed to allow the states as much flexibility as possible, but the total cost of the program is unclear. With the current cost of the SNAP program, it is possible budget-strained states may not be willing to pay for

¹⁰¹ Hartline-Grafton, Heather. Food Research and Action Center, "SNAP and Public Health: The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Improving the Health and Well-Being of Americans." Last modified 2013. Accessed April 11, 2014. http://frac.org/pdf/snap_and_public_health_2013.pdf.

¹⁰² Food Research and Action Center, "Strengthening SNAP in the 2013 Farm Bill." Last modified 2012. Accessed April 11, 2014. <http://frac.org/strengthening-snap-in-the-2012-farm-bill/>.

the administrative costs associated with the SNAP incentive. This uncertainty adds further roadblocks to passing Congress.

- Existing Programs: As stated earlier, there are a number of state programs, faith-based organizations, and foundations are already addressing the issue of food insecurity and have created matching programs to incentivize healthy eating. It would be best to focus on the existing partnerships and use the Center's resources to provide support. There are food pantries across the country reporting a lack of financial resources and increased need. Utilizing the Center's manpower and grant program, greater efforts should be made to ensure these programs' viability in feeding Americans in need. This is a short-term solution to the problem of hunger.

The administration should maintain its focus on job-creation and the economic recovery, rather than spending the political capital to expand social programs. The Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships should continue its programs with the First Lady's Let's Move efforts, not try to pursue legislative action. Congress is more likely to pass such legislation in later years when there are fewer enrollees and SNAP returns to pre-recession levels. This should be priority measure in the 2019, when the farm bill is up for reauthorization.

Curriculum Vita

Kaitlin Kaufman was born in Miami, Florida on November 4, 1989. She attended Brandeis University located in Waltham, Massachusetts, earning an undergraduate degree in History. She found her interest in policy while working for local, state, and national campaigns throughout New England. Upon graduation, she relocated to Washington, DC and began working for the Ballot Initiative Strategy, a nonprofit organization building a national, progressive strategy for ballot measures. During this time she attended Johns Hopkins University, earning a Master of Arts degree in Public Management in May 2014.